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**A STUDY ON ETHNIC MINORITIES
DURING SOVIET UNION PERIOD IN RUSSIAN LITERARY
WORK: THE NOVEL *JAMILIA* BY CHINGIZ AITMATOV**

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Abstract

Literary works in the era of the Soviet Union is a literary work that belongs to the socialist realism stream. This stream was used by the Soviet government to help propagate communism-socialism throughout its territory, as well as in the world. However, Chingiz Aitmatov's novel, *Jamilia*, does not use the stream. This novel addresses the life in a Kyrgyz society in the era of the Soviet Union. The novel was published in 1958, at the peak of Russification by the Soviet government to all its territory. However, Aitmatov managed to portray the identity of the Kyrgyz people, part of the Soviet Union, with all its peculiarities. This novel illustrates the identity of the Kyrgyz people confronted with the identity of the Soviet Union - Russia through the characters in the story.

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan, socialist realism, Russian literature, Central Asia, identity

Introduction

In Russia, a writer and his literary works are another form of government, or often called a second government (Solzhenitsyn, 1968). This is due to the diversity of literary works present in Russia in the era of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union until the end of the era of the Russian Federation. The influence of literary work was so strong in Russia that the Russian government had to interfere. In Russia, literary works play a very important role for the development of culture and society (Elfira, 2012). Literary work is one of the national identities of Russian society.

Periodisation of literary works in Russia can be divided into several periods. The period of the Russian Empire, or the tsarist period, marks the beginning of Russian literature which appeared in the era of the Russian Empire around the 10th century until 1911. The next period was the period of the Soviet

Union in 1921-1991. Next, it was during the era of the Russian Federation in 1991 until present. Each period of literary work in Russia has its own characteristics. The period of the Russian Empire is referred to as one of the periods best known in the world due to the birth of works by Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky to Nikola Gogol. The period of the Soviet Union was known as the ideology of socialist realism which was issued as the official ideology of literary works desired by the Soviet government. Meanwhile, there has been more freedom during Republican Federation period due to openness to the West or the presence of capitalism in Russia, which has given a new colour to the treasures of Russian literature.

Kyrgyzstan was one of the countries that became part of the Soviet Union in 1922-1991. Kyrgyzstan, or the Soviet period known as Kyrgyzstan SSR, Kyrgyzstan's Soviet Socialist Republic, is not a state known to have produced literary works with socialist realism in the Soviet Union era (Moser, 1992). After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, which triggered a civil war in Russia until the Soviet Union was finally formed in 1922, Kyrgyzstan was one of the territories under Russian rule.

Kyrgyzstan is located about four thousand kilometres from Moscow. This can be seen as one of the reasons for placing Kyrgyzstan as an "external" state or satellite for the Soviet Union. The main reason was that in the Soviet era, everything had to be centred in Moscow, so was literature. In Soviet times, literary works were determined by the government. Every literary work should carry a great theme of socialist realism. The works carried by Soviet writers, guided in a large set of Soviet writers, had to support the big theme of socialist realism and fully support Russian identity. This happened as part of a large Soviet government mission called the Russification process. Russification is the process of eliminating the ethnic identity of non-Russian communities, such as Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Tatar and turning them into a big identity called Russian identity (Kassof, 1968).

The Russification process in Kyrgyz has occurred since the era of the Russian Empire. Kyrgyzstan society was not originally a 'modern' society as proclaimed by Moscow. The life of many people in the period of 1920s was still nomadic, or moving from one place to another. The Soviet government, meanwhile, wanted a uniform industrialisation of development throughout the Soviet state, as proclaimed in its Five-Year Development Program (Kenez, 2006). On that basis, there was the process of formation of Russian-style identity, or Russification, against the Kyrgyz community. In fact, this process occurred not in the Soviet era alone, but it had happened since the time of the Russian Empire.

However, Russification in Central Asia in the era of the Russian Empire was not significant.

The Russification process reached its peak when the Soviet Union was formed (Paksoy, 1995). In this period, the state of the Soviet Union received illiteracy eradication programs and a compulsory program to learn Russian. In addition, the people of Kyrgyzstan also gained the educational pattern of Russian society that Moscow required them to, and Kyrgyzstan-related activities were avoided in the name of Soviet. The Kyrgyz community prior to the era of Russification had used Arabic script and Latin script in the field of writing. However, after the process of Russification by the Soviet government, the use of Latin and Arabic letters was replaced by Russian Cyril letters.

Chingiz Aitmatov was one of the people of Kyrgyzstan who underwent this Russification process. He received Russian literacy education as the impact of the Russification program that took place in Kyrgyzstan. Chingiz Aitmatov wrote a work entitled *Jamilia* in 1958. This work was published when the Soviet Union was launching a literary program of socialist realism. However, this literary work written by Aitmatov did not lead to the socialist realism stream. Interestingly, the novel was still published in the Soviet Union and Aitmatov was not given any sanction by the Soviet government.

This paper analyses how Kyrgyzstan's ethnic identity is featured in Chingiz Aitmatov's *Jamilia* novel published in the repressive era of the Soviet Union. Kyrgyzstan identity can be examined with the approach of Stuart Hall's theory of identity. We analyse how Kyrgyz's identity is correlated with the Russia-Soviet identity established by its government. Hall revealed that identity is fluid, its character always changes and shaped by subjects and objects based on time and space (Hall, 1997). This approach is used to observe the contestation of ethnic Kyrgyz identity with Russian-Soviet identity as depicted in Chingiz Aitmatov's *Jamilia* novel.

The Position of the Literary Work *Jamilia* in the Soviet Union and the Kyrgyz Identity Portrait in *Jamilia*

This novel was published in 1958, the period when socialist realism stream was rapidly flourishing in all states of the Soviet Union. However, the portrayal of the identity displayed in this novel does not describe the structure of Soviet society. This novel illustrates that there is a peculiarity of the identity of the Kyrgyz ethnic, precisely when it became part of the empire of the Soviet Union.

“It all happened when I was still a young lad, in the third year of the war... I live in the Big House... My father is a carpenter, after saying his prayers today, he went to work... Our close relatives live in the house next door or, at it is known in the village, the Little House. I call them close relatives because we all live as one big family. We have kept the tradition going since nomadic times, when collectivisation comes...” (Aitmatov, 2007)

From this quote, it can be observed that this novel took the background in the 1940s. It is said that the story experienced by the character I (Seit) occurred in the third year after the war. The war referred to in the context of this novel is World War II, which of course has an impact on all its people regardless of the state in the Soviet Union they live in. The events of World War II are emphasised by Aitmatov to describe the depictions of the constellation of Kyrgyz-Russian (Soviet) ethnic identity after the Soviet Union was formed and occurred after the Soviet Union promoted the Sovietification-Russification program. Thus, it is clearly illustrated that this story took place in the 1940s.

The next explanation of Big House and Little House is a tangible manifestation that there is an emphasis on Kyrgyz ethnicity. In the policy of the Soviet government, the people are depicted living in communal apartments built by the government and no classification of large or small apartment. This is one of the ways in which the society of Soviet socialism embodies the opposition of a large house or small house, all of which must be regarded as equal and no class distinction.

However, in this novel it seems that the Kyrgyz community has its own identity, which has been going on for generations long before the Soviet period. Aitmatov illustrates that the Kyrgyz ethnic group had a distinctness that was not lost despite the policies of the Soviet government, with all its power, had already entered Kyrgyzstan. Aitmatov tried to negotiate by describing the term collectivisation, which was clearly Soviet policy. This aims to negotiate Kyrgyz ethnic identity, with its uniqueness as living in a large house, with the fact that Kyrgyzstan is part of the Soviet Union.

The collectivisation written by Aitmatov describes the periodisation of Stalin's policies, and thus the representation of the Soviet government with its policies clearly took place in Kyrgyzstan. The depiction of Kyrgyz's identity and accompanied by the Soviet policy was a way of negotiating Aitmatov in positioning Jamilia's literary work in Soviet society at that time, 1958, while presenting the Soviet government as a powerful figure to the Kyrgyz community. This contestations are clearly illustrated that despite the identity of the Kyrgyz

community, the Soviet government remained in power by the mention of its Collectivisation program.

The Kyrgyz identity highlighted in this novel is the mention of the term 'family'. Terms such as *kichi* - young mother, *kichine bala* - small child, *jigit* - protector of the family, and *ustaka* - respecting parents as carpenters are often presented and illustrated vividly. This can be read as one way of resistance perpetrated by Aitmatov, a Kyrgyz, against the power of the Soviet government. The Soviet government commanded the Kyrgyz community to abandon all things that were 'local' and to follow the Russification process following the nature of the Russians. This included speaking in Russian, using Russian Cyril letters, and living like a Russian through the program of the collectivisation. However, Aitmatov instead illustrates that Kyrgyz's identity was not lost under the pressure from the central government. Indeed, the language used was Russian with Russian letters, but in the context of the text, it emphasises the existence of unique terms belonging to Kyrgyz ethnicity. This can also be read as a way to introduce the uniqueness of ethnic Kyrgyz to other Soviet communities by taking refuge behind Russian-language texts but still displaying their distinctive characteristics.

Representation of Kyrgyz Identity in The Era of Soviet Rule

"Praise to Allah, my daughter. Mother would say that you've come into a strong and blessed house. That's your good fortune. A woman's happiness is to have children and live in a house of plenty. And one day you'll have, thank the Lord, all we old folks have acquired..." (Aitmatov, 2007).

The excerpt above illustrates how one of the characters in Jamilia's novel is the mother of Jamilia, who expresses her gratitude to God and talks about how to reach happiness according to Kyrgyz people. This can be read as one way of resistance against the Soviet government depicted by Aitmatov through the identity of this character. In the period of Soviet rule, symbols affiliated with religion were not permitted. The official religion for the Soviet state is absent: *the official state of atheism*. Thus, Aitmatov describes the Kyrgyz ethnic resistance by showing that Kyrgyz ethnicity was still religious, proven by the act of giving thanks to God as a representation of the belief of the Islamic community.

In addition, this quote also reveals the portrait of happiness that Kyrgyz women used to describe, which is living together with children and have a lot of homes. It also emphasises that Kyrgyz women were grateful to God with the life in sustenance. This illustrates that at that time the Kyrgyz ethnic community believed that happiness does not come from the state of the Soviet Union as the

medium where Russification representation takes place with its policies, but it comes from God.

Aitmatov also described that Jamilia lives in a strong and blessed family. The context of the word *House* in this novel refers to the family where Jamilia lives. It is mentioned that the family is strong and blessed, according to the Kyrgyz teachings of Islam. There are two identities highlighted here, namely the Soviet and Kyrgyz identity. Soviet identity is shown by the mention of a strong family. This novel takes the setting of a period of three years after World War II began, which means that the situation it refers to was still in a state of war.

A strong identity is depicted here in order to show that the whole Soviet society, including the Kyrgyz ethnic group, was a strong society. The sentence that mentions about Jamilia coming from a strong and blessed family with a mother figure indirectly represents the spirit of the Soviet era at the time, namely "Motherland's Call" for World War II. The word "blessed" in the above quotation can be analysed as one way Aitmatov put emphasis on the Kyrgyz ethnic identity that did not easily accept everything from the Russification by the Soviet government. It shows that the people of Kyrgyzstan, apart from the older and younger generation - through the representation of Mother and Jamilia, still expressed their gratitude to God and acknowledged His existence. The rejection of the state atheism ideology enforced by the Soviet government can be conveyed with the words of this blessed family.

From this quote it is seen that Kyrgyz ethnic identity had contested with the identity of the Soviet society. Aitmatov, using Russian, illustrates that Kyrgyz's identity persisted. This identity did not simply disappear with the Russification program at the time of the Soviet Union. Precisely with this quote, Aitmatov conveys his resistance to the Soviet government implicitly by showing that the Kyrgyz ethnic did not necessarily belong to atheism, as they still gave thanks to God and represented happiness by gratitude to God over the state.

Justification of Kyrgyzstan-Kazakhstan Identity In the Era of Soviet Administration

"... if only I could recreate his song. It contained few words, yet even without words it revealed great human soul. I have never heard such singing before or since. The tune was like neither Kyrgyz or Kazakh, yet in it was something of both. His music combined the very best melodies of the two related peoples and had woven them into a single, unrepeatable song. It was a song of the mountains and the steppe, first soaring up into the sky like the Kyrgyz mountains, then rolling freely like the Kazakh steppe..." (Aitmatov, 2007:57)

Aitmatov in fact did not only use Kyrgyzstan ethnic identity alone to show the existence of ethnic minorities in the period Russification Soviet government. Aitmatov shows that there were other multiethnic nations that were also in the Soviet repressive shadow but retained their identity. In the above quote, it can be analysed about the beauty of a song whose identity was between Kyrgyz or Kazakh ethnic origin.

The song in the novel is described by Daniyar, a Red Soldier who is allowed to return home from injury. This figure is a representation of individuals who had been acknowledged to have been able to defend their country by fighting in the Great Patriotic War - World War II, but just when he could return to his home region, he still sang a song characterised by Kyrgyz/Kazakh music. This is something that contradicts the Soviet government's policy of pursuing Soviet unity by no longer representing a particular ethnic identity.

Moreover, the assertion that the music made by the Soviet soldier was such a beautiful piece of music, and as a form of merging of two ethnicities and combined into such a beautiful rhythm is a denial of the greatness of Soviet government Russification. The full-fledged music to flourish in the Soviet era was supposed to be the music of march, the music of passion, the anti-Western music - in the rhythmic sense of music from Western Europe and the United States, while the music of every ethnicity was not justified for public display. Aitmatov blatantly calls that the music sung by the soldier character to be such a beautiful music as it was a mixture of Kazakh and Kyrgyz ethnicity.

This seems to illustrate that the Kyrgyz and Kazakh ethnic music persisted, unaffected by the Russification – Sovietification. The character of the Red Soldier is Daniyar, who is told to have taken part in the Soviet defence in the name of the Soviet government, was educated by Russian command, in accordance with the doctrine of the Soviets still singing the Kyrgyz/Kazakh ethnic song which he considers to be considered more beautiful.

This argument is reinforced by the claim that the song sung by Daniyar, the Red Soldier character, is a song depicting mountains and valleys. The Kyrgyz and Kazakh ethnic identities as ethnic minorities affected by Soviet Soviet Russification are presented clearly. His portrayal stating that the song sung by Daniyar is a song that identifies the spirit of life in mountains and valleys, and there is no feeling of better freedom than when walking in the Kazakh mountain valley.

The word freedom in the above quotation symbolises that Kyrgyz ethnic freedom can be expressed by riding or traveling between mountains and valleys that are widespread among Kyrgyz and Kazakh countries. This is contrary to

freedom with the context of Soviet rule in the era of World War II that positioned freedom was to be free from German Nazi.

The freedom slogans displayed by the Soviet Government were always associated with World War II, while Daniyar who represents a member of the Soviet Red Army actually displays the freedom that can be read with a certain ethnic characteristic, ie freedom according to Kyrgyz people, by wandering between mountains and valleys. By declaring certain ethnic liberties specific, we can analyse that the Russification implemented by the Soviet government had not worked well to all levels of society during World War II.

Kyrgyz and Kazakh identities are shown as strong as the Soviet government's identity. The character Daniyar as a representation of the Soviet government was made to negotiate with Kazakh and Kyrgyz ethnic identity with all its uniqueness. Aitmatov displays Daniyar as a representation of a failed, defeated Soviet, and thus reveals his true identity of his Kyrgyz ethnic identity.

Conclusion

According to Stuart Hall, identity is fluid. Identity changes and can be constructed according to the constructor (Hall, 1997). Thus we can infer that the Soviet identity as well as the Kyrgyz and Kazakh ethnic identity in the Jamilia novel appear to be mutually contested among the dominant, the representation of government through Sovietification, and the marginal, that is the ethnic identity of Kyrgyz and Kazakhstan.

This emphasis on Kyrgyz and Kazakh ethnic identity can be observed as a subtle resistance expressed by Aitmatov against the policies issued by the Soviet Administration. The analysis of Aitmatov's works can be read that as if there were more speciality of the Kyrgyz and Kazakh ethnic groups than that of Soviet society that had been exposed to Russification. That is what can be read as an embodiment of ethnic Kyrgyz and Kazakhs through the novel 'Jamilia' written in Russian.

As marginal ethnic groups as well as under the dominant power of the Soviet government, either through censorship or the spirit of Sovietification – Motherland in the context of World War II, both ethnics still could not be eliminated easily. Local identity belonging to ethnic Kyrgyz and Kazakhs remained alive in society, despite the emergence of common enemies during World War II. The situation that Aitmatov wrote about in 1957 came into being when the Soviet Union collapsed on December 25, 1991. Since then, the Kyrgyz ethnic community has separated themselves into Kyrgyzstan while the Kazakhs have broken off into the Kazakhstan. Regardless of the separation of the two from

a Russian state entity, they remain dependent on Russia in economics, science, and defence of the country.

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